



October 31, 2011

Deborah Damore, Chief Procurement Officer
State of Vermont
Office of Purchasing & Contracting
Department of Buildings & General Services
10 Baldwin Street
Montpelier, VT 05633-7501

Re: Future Use of Waterbury State Office Complex

Dear Ms. Damore,

Vermont Integrated Architecture (VIA) is happy to submit the attached response to the recent RFI regarding the future use of the Waterbury State Office Complex.

We understand that this is a complex problem that affects all Vermonters for many years to come and that the State is trying to figure out the best way forward – we offer some thoughts and observations in our response. We look forward to the next steps, and hopefully engaging in the process as it unfolds.

Thank you for your consideration.

Ashar Nelson

Ashar Nelson, AIA, LEED AP BD+C
Principal

Future Use of Waterbury State Office Complex

Waterbury, Vermont

Statement of Interest Cover Page

November 3, 2011



Vermont Integrated Architecture, P.C.
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Middlebury, Vermont 05753
802-377-5901

Contact: Ashar Nelson
ashar@vermontintegratedarchitecture.com

Background

On August 29, 2011 Vermonters awoke to a changed landscape, both physically and emotionally. The land, buildings and social structures that had been in place for generations were changed in one day, altering our very history. The community of Waterbury was one of the hardest hit. Floodwaters damaged not only homes and village infrastructure, but also removed one vital economic engine of the village – the 1500 state employees that called the Waterbury State Office Complex (WSOC) home.

The State of Vermont has acted with incredible speed to stabilize the buildings at the WSOC, but it seems that there is not yet a clear path forward on how these resources might be best used. The RFI to solicit interest in the future use of is a good step, and hopefully it will uncover some creative ideas.

In thinking through this opportunity, we have had some key thoughts:

Flood Risk: The fact that most of the WSOC buildings are located in the flood plain needs to be addressed. With the increasing frequency of major storm events, the same risk of future flooding that makes these buildings unattractive to the State will make them unattractive to private developers and private developers will find it difficult if not impossible to finance the projects if this risk is not mitigated.

Building Use: The unique use of the 700,000 sf as State Offices contributes greatly to the economic health of Waterbury and the surrounding communities. The absorption rate for this amount of square footage into the community would likely be decades (similar to what occurred at the Brandon Training School) without a commitment from the State to return some employees to Waterbury. Even with incentives, agency help for private business tenants, creative permitting and/or other methods, perspective developers would likely need the guarantee of an anchor tenant to be able to bring a feasible plan to the table.

Historic Preservation: The age and historic significance of the buildings that form the WSOC and are integral to the Waterbury Village Historic District are both an asset and a liability. Both the flood risk and the size/use challenges suggest that one way to preserve the integrity of the whole would be to thin out buildings; balancing the need to retain those that are critical in contributing to the unique place, have the greatest historic and cultural value, and provide the best opportunities for re-use with those that are in poor shape and perform poorly.

Sustainability: The collection of buildings that make up the current WSOC campus represent a lot of embodied energy and material resources, not to mention economic investment. Any solution that can creatively re-use these assets would be environmentally better than recycling the building materials and far better than outright demolition and landfilling. Any renovation of these buildings allows them to be upgraded to current standards for energy use, both reducing the environmental impacts of that fuel use as well as reducing the volatility of operational costs.

Who We Are

Vermont Integrated Architecture is a full service architecture firm located in Middlebury, VT. We are a young firm, formed in early 2011, but our principles, Ashar Nelson and Andrea Murray, have nearly forty years of combined experience in the design and construction industry. Core to our philosophy is the idea that a robust, thoughtful and comprehensive planning process is key to developing strategies and solutions that strengthen communities and are economically viable and environmentally sustainable.

Our strengths lie in communications, management of complex processes, creative problem solving and planning, and integrating sustainability into solutions. We also bring to the table long-term relationships with specialized consultants in various disciplines. We have worked on planning and master-planning efforts with businesses, non-profits, municipalities and community energy projects.

Please see our resumes at the end of this document for more information about our backgrounds.

A Way Forward

In perusing the RFI documents, attending the site walk through with State Officials and John Ostrum, and following the story of the WSOC and options for homes of State Offices on VPR and other local media, we see the following activities as possible steps to develop a solution for the re-use of the WSOC.

Master-planning – Engage in a thoughtful and inclusive planning process to identify the highest and best use for the WSOC campus in the future. It sounds like the State was about to start a master-planning process before Irene came along – although the physical conditions have changed, the careful strategic thinking employed in master-planning would bring valuable information to bear, and down-shift the response out of ‘crisis’ mode. A typical master-planning process would include a thorough look at the buildings and site as well as transportation issues, energy use, construction costs, opportunities for sustainability, and even consider factors such as education standards and social trends.

Market Analysis – In conjunction with or as part of the master-planning work, a market analysis study can be conducted to identify local and regional trends in various economic sectors and housing markets. This information will allow better decision making in developing a vision for the future of the WSOC. The State may already have much of the data for this type of analysis.

Open Process – Although top-down solutions always seem easier to manage, there are several key populations who will invariably make themselves heard during this process, and an open process allows for that input as well as broadening the base for creative input. Opening up the process to the Waterbury community and the former State Employee users will provide access to more knowledge and experience of former users and locals, and allow better buy-in to the long-term solutions.

Creative Solutions – The solution to this scale and type of problem may be one that we have never envisioned before. Perhaps we can find a way for the WSOC to co-exist with flood plain – wet flood-proofing and abandoning all lower levels may allow us to save the economic and historic capital we already have invested in the upper levels, and regain much of the existing square footage for much less cost than developing new buildings. The outcome will certainly be better if we allow time and openness in the dialogue for out-of-the-box solutions.

Lastly, we are aware of the intense pressure for action in response to a crisis like Irene. With the likelihood of a return to the status quo at almost zero, appropriate time must be left for the process to develop a plan for these buildings in our rapidly changing future. Even if the State can make some big decisions early, like committing to return some State employees back to Waterbury, the planning for the overall solution is not instant – we hope that adequate time will be left for a solid process.

Hopefully these thoughts can help you as you are developing a method to address the WSOC. We are definitely interested in helping carry this effort forward. Please keep us on the contact list for future RFPs on this work.

Thank You,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ashar Nelson', with a stylized, flowing script.

Ashar Nelson
Principal
Vermont Integrated Architecture



Ashar Nelson, AIA, LEED AP BD+C

Professional Experience

2011 – Present	Vermont Integrated Architecture Principal
2000 – 2011	Bread Loaf Architects Planners Builders Project Architect
1999 – 2000	Self-Employed Design-BUILDER
1992 – 1996	Bread Loaf Construction Carpenter & Crew Leader

Selected Projects

Vermont Integrated Architecture

- 2011 Middlebury Community Center – Feasibility Study & conceptual Design for Municipal Building & Plaza
- 2011 Belvidere Old District #2 School House
- 2011 Nuovo Residence – Interior Renovation

Bread Loaf Architects Planners Builders

- 2010 Middlebury Energy Cooperative - Project Management, Public Outreach Facilitator
- 2010 Vermont Academy Fuller Hall – Great Room Restoration and Access Project
- 2009 Vermont Academy Learning Skills Center – Historic Preservation and Adaptive Reuse
- 2008 Middlebury Town Hall Theater – Historic Preservation, Plaza Design, and Adaptive Reuse
- 2007 Vermont Academy Leavitt House – Addition and Renovation
- 2006 Health Care and Rehabilitation Services of Southeastern Vermont – New Facility & Associated Landscape
- 2005 Farm and Wilderness Dairy Barn and Resource Center – New Facilities
- 2003 Town of Middlebury Police Department – New Facility

Education

1999 University of Oregon - Master Degree in Architecture

1992 Middlebury College - Bachelor of Arts Degree in Art & Architectural History
Independent Minor in American Civilization

Other

Teaching

2006 – Present Middlebury College: Architectural Design, Planning, Solar
Decathlon

1997 – 1999 University of Oregon: Graduate Teaching Fellow – Design-
Build Studios

Volunteer

Middlebury Natural Foods Co-op (Board of Directors); Town of Middlebury Various Planning
Initiatives; Vermont Green Building Network (Founding Member); Middlebury Design Advisory
Board; Middlebury Area Land Trust

Professional Organizations

American Institute of Architects, U.S. Green Building Council, Vermont Green Building Network,
Vermont Builders for Social Responsibility



Andrea Murray, AIA, NCARB, LEED AP BD+C

Professional Experience

2010 – Present	Vermont Integrated Architecture Principal
2003 – 2010	Bread Loaf Architects Planners Builders Project Architect
2001 – 2003	Flynn + Stott Architects, PC Architectural intern
1997 – 2000 Projects	New York City Department of Sanitation Division of Special Architectural Intern
1993 – 1994	William McDonough Architects Public Relations and Communications Leader

Selected Projects

Vermont Integrated Architecture

- 2011 Middlebury Community Center – Feasibility Study & Conceptual Design for Municipal Building & Plaza
- 2011 Middlebury Eye Associates – Addition & Renovation
- 2011 Rochester Public Library – VCDP Project - Building Addition, Accessibility Upgrades, and Landscape Design

Bread Loaf Architects Planners Builders

- 2010 Greenwood School Founder's Hall – New Dormitory & Landscape Design
- 2010 Vermont Studio Center – Sustainable Master Plan, including Greenspace Allocations
- 2009 Hilltop Montessori School – Master Landscape Plan and New School Building
- 2009 Vermont Academy Learning Skills Center – Historic Preservation and Adaptive Reuse
- 2009 University of Vermont McCauley Hall – Historic Preservation and Interior Renovation

2008 Brattleboro Food Co-op – Feasibility Study
2006 Health Care and Rehabilitation Services of Southeastern Vermont – New Facility & Landscape Design
2005 Landmark College Bridge Houses – New Student Residence Buildings
2004 Project Independence – New Facility

Education

1997 Pratt Institute - Bachelor Degree in Architecture - Summa cum Laude

1991 Syracuse University - Bachelor of Arts Degree in English & Textual Studies

Other

Teaching

2006 – Present Middlebury College: Architectural Design, Environment, Solar Decathlon

Professional Organizations

American Institute of Architects, U.S. Green Building Council, Vermont Green Building Network



Thank you for your consideration.